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THE PRINCETON SEMINARY BULLETIN

The Finality of Jesus Christ
Robert E. Speer Memorial Lecture

Elmer G. Homrighausen

VOLUME LXVII, NUMBER 2

SPRING 1975

PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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THE PRINCETON SEMINARY BULLETIN

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THE BULLETIN is published quarterly by The Theological Seminary of the United Presbyterian Church at Princeton, New Jersey. Numbers 1, 2, and 3 of each volume are mailed free of charge to all alumni and on an exchange basis with various institutions. Number 4 in the series is the academic catalogue (undergraduate) of the Seminary and may be obtained only by request to the Office of the Registrar.

Second-class postage paid at Princeton, New Jersey 08540

The Princeton Seminary Bulletin

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The Finality of Jesus Christ Robert E. Speer Memorial Lecture

by

Elmer G. Homrighausen¹

I AM honored by the invitation of Huntingdon Presbytery and the Seminary to give a lecture relating to the memory of Robert E. Speer. Yet I am humbled even to the point of frustration by the assignment. No one can deal adequately with the life and career of Dr. Speer; besides, what has already been written about him by President John A. Mackay, Mr. John G. Buchanan, and the late Dean Edward H. Roberts has been so well done that it is presumptuous for anyone to add to their tributes. And I am further humbled by the theme of this address—The Finality of Jesus Christ. This was the title of Dr. Speer's 1933 Stone Lectures at the Seminary, perhaps his *magnum opus*, in which his vast learning and deep experience are clearly expressed. My lecture will relate the finality of Jesus Christ to the faith, life and work of one of God's most faithful and obedient sons.

I am pleased that this discussion of the finality of Jesus Christ is related to the person of Robert E. Speer. I believe Robert E. Speer was one of the finest persons ever shaped by Jesus Christ. And through loving obedience the historical "form" of Jesus Christ was enhanced by Speer's dedicated and varied gifts. I am sure Dr. Speer regarded the subject of his Stone Lectures not only in technical theological terms but in terms of a living faith into which he was born, to which he tried to be faithful, in which he matured, and which he sought to share with others around the world in the spirit of self-giving love he learned from his Lord.

I shall make a few remarks about (I) the man Robert E. Speer; about (II) his motivation as a "Christ-centered man, missionary crusader, and ecumenical pioneer," in the words of Dr. Mackay; and then discuss (III) the finality of Jesus Christ in the light of (1) the developing missionary enterprise; (2) the cultural and religious developments of modern history; and (3) the Christological discussions of our time.

I

Robert E. Speer was born in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, in 1867, into a Christian home infused with culture, Christian attitudes and traditions. His father, a prom-

¹ Delivered in Miller Chapel, Princeton Theological Seminary, March 13, 1974, by Elmer G. Homrighausen, Dean and Professor of Pastoral Theology, Emeritus.

inent lawyer in the community made a deep impression upon young Robert, and early made him want to be a Justice of the Supreme Court. Robert early absorbed a love for the out-of-doors which he cultivated all through life. Educated at Phillips Andover, Princeton University, and Princeton Theological Seminary, he manifested qualities of leadership in athletic, academic and campus activities. At the University he was Valedictorian of his class. He excelled in public speaking, literary productions, athletic ability, academic excellence, all of which stood him in good stead when during his second year at Princeton Seminary he was called to be secretary of Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, a post which he held with distinction for forty-six years.

He was elected Moderator of the Presbyterian General Assembly, the second layman to hold that office, and by acclamation. He was President of the Federal Council of Churches during four of its critical years. He was Chairman of the Committee on Latin America for twenty-six years. He was a member of the Board of Trustees of Princeton Seminary, and its Chairman from 1937 to 1946.

To read the register of his literary productions is exhausting. He wrote books, reports, and articles. They range in subject matter from biographies to ethics, Biblical studies to Latin American problems, mission policies and principle to race relations, the marks of a man to Christianity and the nations, the awakening Orient to speaking without notes, from re-thinking missions to personal devotions.

Speer was a massive man and yet one of great humility and humanity. His was a commanding presence that seemed to many overpowering; yet his authority rested not on office and position but upon integrity, knowledge, ability and genuineness. He worked with concentration, tenacity and discipline, but he never expected others to imitate him. Rather he suggested that each person do his own "thing" according to his own gifts with a sense of stewardship. He was a man of deep and firm convictions but he never sought to impose these convictions on others. He respected the positions of others and when overridden in a group action he accepted the decision without personal resentment. He administered a world-wide enterprise, and yet he knew each person in the organization. He was a loyal Presbyterian, but he was an ecumenist who believed that the unity of the church was essential to the credibility of the Gospel. He practiced the discipline of privacy, but he was also a warm conversationalist with friends and family. He scarcely engaged in small talk, flippant jokes, or office gossip, and yet there was a genial and even humorous aspect of his life which was unknown to many. He had his share of suffering in his concern for missionaries and new Christians, his conflict with churchmen who accused him of heresy and who sought to disrupt the peace of the church, his pained reaction to the laymen's report on missions which seemed to reduce the high Christology of the faith, and especially his personal grief when his son, Elliott, was assassinated by an unknown person while serving as Headmaster of Mt. Hermon School. Yet, he bore these sufferings with the same endurance and hope he has recommended to others in several of his books.

He was a man of great credibility. He stood as a pillar in church and society. When he arose to speak in General Assembly everyone listened, for they knew that

here was a man deeply dedicated to Christ, well-informed on the matter at issue, clear in his grasp of the issues in the subject, and prophetic in his hope for the Gospel.

II

Where did Robert E. Speer get his motivation to be what he was and to do what he did?

Indeed, one must take many things into account: family heritage; Christian tradition; education in academy, university and seminary; responsibilities on the athletic field; debating activities; academic studies; association with wife, family and friends; administrative burdens in church, seminary and foreign missions; conflicts in church relationships; tragic grief and serious illness; and the faithful stewardship of his unusual capacities in a challenging and demanding leadership. And, of course, the times in which he lived. He lived and served in a period when the Christian enterprise experienced its greatest period of expansion. Robert E. Speer was an epochal person in an epochal period in history.

But, he was primarily motivated by his conviction that he had been "called" or "apprehended" by Jesus Christ to give his life in obedient service. During his university years a revival of the Christian faith moved many students to offer themselves for missionary service overseas. It "turned on" young men like Speer, Mott, Mackay, Wilder, Forman, Zwemer, Eddy and thousands of their generation. They were caught up in a student volunteer movement that had sensed a new dimension in the great commission. Speer was "converted" and joined the church during his years at Princeton University. From then on his one constant passion was to make Jesus Christ known, trusted, loved and obeyed everywhere. His appeal to youth was the claim of Jesus Christ over the totality of human life, personal and corporate. He was interested in missions expressed evangelistically, educationally, medically, agriculturally and politically.

Speer was motivated by a profound personal conviction that Jesus Christ is final, unique and universal. In his Stone Lectures he writes that Jesus Christ is "not only the center of Christianity, but its beginning and ending as well. He is all in all." He wished that he could find words that were adequate enough to highly exalt Jesus Christ or make more clear and vivid the faith that he is God and the Son of God, not to be classified in any human category, the One Savior from sin and the One Answer to the need of the world. Indeed, he regarded Christianity as so unique that he did not want it to be called a "religion."

Speer was also motivated by the theological issues that were brewing regarding the finality of Jesus Christ. In the 1930's he wrote, "We are facing today, in the Christian Church, at home and abroad and therefore of course the missionary enterprise abroad, the fundamental questions of the meaning and value of Christ and of the nature of Christianity." He asked questions like these: "Is Christ unique, final, absolute and universal? Is he the world's only Saviour and Redeemer? Is he God and the only Son of God? Or was he only one of us and no more, a fellow-seeker after truth and life, perhaps an example still ahead of us, or perhaps not

an example at all, but only a Galilean peasant hemmed in by limitations which we have transcended, or at the most, the great religious genius, worthy to talk with or lead the company of the world's religious leaders?"

He asked, "What must the Christian attitude be towards evaluations of Christ which it believes to be inadequate or untrue towards other religions, including versions of Christianity which it believes to be inauthentic?" While these questions, he maintained, are not new, they meet us in new forms with new pressure.

Speer's Stone Lectures dealt with the whole range of the Church's thought about and response to Jesus Christ from the beginning in the New Testament to his own time. He evaluates the views of Locke, Reitzenstein, Kalthoff, Drews, and many others.

But Speer maintained that the finality of Jesus Christ meant that Christianity began in a set of historical facts and their necessary evaluation and interpretation in the New Testament, and that it was this authentic Christianity which alone was able to produce the social, moral and spiritual fruitage by which the tree has been judged and proved. "The dynamic of love and sacrifice and transformation for any long time and over any wide area is undetachable from its sources in the truth as to who and what Christ is. A human Jesus has never been able to humanize life. The love that is the true law and light of life has its roots in the love of God as revealed in His only begotten Son."

This Jesus Christ and his authority and power is the motivation of Speer's life and vocation.

III (1)

The finality of Jesus Christ has always been the major motivation of the missionary enterprise. It was so for Robert E. Speer. But during his career as missionary statesman the finality of Jesus Christ in the missionary enterprise faced severe testing. As has already been indicated, Speer was aware of the issues involved and participated vigorously and intelligently in them as they challenged this finality in the area of missions.

The missionary enterprise became ecumenically visible in 1910 when delegates from mission boards and independent agencies met for the first time in Edinburgh. Significantly only seventeen attendants came from "missionary" churches. The major concern of those who met was a strategy for world missions or world evangelization, thought of largely in terms of peoples as yet unreached by missionaries from sending churches and agencies. Traditional creedal forms were taken for granted. There was great concern for those who were dying without Christ. As a result of the Edinburgh Conference, the International Missionary Council (IMC) was born in 1921. It held meetings at various places; drafted significant reports; discussed the nature, problems, crises, and strategies of missions until it was merged with the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1961, to form the Division of World Mission and Evangelism at New Delhi, India. While Edinburgh is regarded as the original source of the ecumenical movement which resulted in the WCC, the ecumenical missionary concerns of churches and independent agencies carried on parallel to the WCC until 1961. It is to be noted that Edinburgh was not concerned about doctrinal or ecclesiastical issues; rather, it believed that "carrying the

Gospel to the world could best be achieved by concentrating on common purposes," as Samuel M. Cavert has observed.

The history of the IMC focused largely in its great conferences: Jerusalem 1928; Madras 1938; Whitby 1947; Willingen 1952; Ghana 1958. Of these perhaps Jerusalem and Madras were the most significant. After merger with the WCC a significant follow-up conference was held in Mexico City in 1963; the first major Conference since the merger was held in Bangkok in 1972. Each of these Conferences is marked by definite emphases all of which indicate new attitudes towards the missionary enterprise and towards the concept of the finality, uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ.

The Jerusalem Conference of 1928 was significant because one-half of the delegates came from missionary churches. The Conference affirmed that its message was Jesus Christ. He is "the revelation of what God is and of what man may become through him." In him we face the ultimate reality of the universe who is God our Father, perfect and infinite in love and righteousness. Jesus Christ is the final and ever-unfolding revelation of God in whom we live and move and have our being. The Conference also declared that in missionary work no ulterior purposes, paternalism, or imperialism are to be practiced. The approach to the task must be in the spirit of humility and repentance. Christ is our motive and Christ is our end. The Gospel is not our achievement; it rests on what we acknowledge as an "act of God." "Our fathers were impressed with the horror that men should *die* without Christ—we share that horror; we are also impressed with the horror that men should *live* without Christ." The Conference also added that while "the true Light shone forth in all its splendor in Jesus Christ, we find rays of that same light where he is unknown and even rejected." And while making no attempt to estimate the spiritual value or content of other religions, the Conference recognized part of the truth in the majesty of God in Islam, the deep sympathy for the world's sorrow and unselfish search for the way of escape in Buddhism, the belief in the moral order of the universe in Confucianism, and the desire for contact with Ultimate Reality conceived as spiritual in Hinduism. And already at this Conference, references were made to rising secularism, scientism, technology and their effect upon world missions. There was also a strong conviction voiced that Christ belongs to all peoples, and that Christianity is not a western religion.

After Jerusalem (1928) and prior to Madras (1938) two important publications created quite a stir in the missionary enterprise: *Re-thinking Missions* (1932), a laymen's report on missions by a committee headed by Dr. William E. Hocking and *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (1938) by Dr. Hendrik Kraemer of Indonesia and later of the World Council of Churches. The former criticized certain missionary practices and raised questions about the theology of missions. While the report affirmed that Christianity was the highest religion to date, it did soften the element of discontinuity between Christianity and other religions, by suggesting that the best in non-Christian religions might be regarded as approaches to the New Testament. The immediate reaction by evangelicals was to regard this point of view as a challenge to the necessity of conversion to Christ and the finality of Jesus Christ. To this report Robert E. Speer replied in a brochure

that circulated 50,000 copies. He found in its theology a faulty basis for missions. Under his leadership the Presbyterian Church in the USA affirmed its loyalty to the historical standards of faith, the absolute finality and universality of Jesus Christ, the sufficiency of the Gospel, and resolved that the Report did not conform to the mission manual of the Church. Dr. Speer's opinions were highly influential in all the denominations.

Kraemer's book came out of his long experience as a missionary in Indonesia; the influence of Kierkegaard and Barth; his relation to the Church struggles in the 1930's with national socialism, communism, and religious syncretism. In his book, he stressed the *sui generis* nature of Christianity and the discontinuity between Christianity and other religions. He maintained that Christianity is not created by the religious aspirations of man; it is not the "tip of the pyramid" of man's universal quest for God. Revelation is God's act and his alone. Kraemer's and Hocking's theses have had a profound and far-reaching effect upon the rationale and practice of missions as well as upon the concepts of the finality and uniqueness of Jesus Christ among the religions of the world.

Madras (1938) proved to be one of the most significant conferences of the churches and missionary agencies. It was attended by 470 persons from 70 countries. It took place in the late 1930's when disturbing tensions were convulsing the world. It was held in an Eastern land, which made it possible for many to attend from the younger churches. The World Council of Churches was in-the-formation. Never had there been such an ecumenical gathering as convened at Madras. It was a "miracle" that the Conference met at all; the task of finding a place to meet was almost insuperable. The theme centered in "the world mission of the Church," which was an indication that *missions* and *church* were related. Madras affirmed the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. It also called attention to the dangers of nationalism, communism and scientific skepticism. It called upon missions to use only the methods of moral and religious suasion, not those of domineering conquest. It expressed appreciation for the religious experiences and moral achievements of other religions and called the churches to a deep and sincere interest in the religious life of those to whom it goes; a fuller and more adequate understanding of other religious faiths as total systems of life; and an appropriation of all that traditional cultures may contribute to the enrichment of life and that of the church universal. It also encouraged cooperation with other religions in social matters. It stated that God has not left himself without witness outside Christianity; there are glimpses of God's yearning after his erring children and that this yearning has not been without response. But these insights have to be tested by God-in-Christ.

The reports of the 16 sections deal with church and state, the church and the changing social and economic order, the church and the international order, as well as with the faith by which the church lives, the nature and function of the church, *et al.*

Since the Madras Conference much has happened in the world and in the ecumenical movement of the churches. The War resulted in refugees, destruction and disruption. It also brought about the rise of new nations, the revolt against and the decline of colonialism, the growth of the Third World. The missionary enter-

prise suffered greatly in personnel, finances and facilities. But in spite of it all, the churches united in the work of relief and rehabilitation, in reconstruction, in trying to maintain and re-establish unity among themselves. Missionary churches became independent and developed their liturgies, models of leadership, theological stances, styles of life. The World Council of Churches in the process of formation became a reality in 1948. National and regional councils of churches came into new or renewed operation. The IMC called conferences in Whitby (1947), Willingen (1952), Ghana (1958), all of which addressed themselves not only to the problems of the missionary enterprise, but concerned themselves with the future of missions in relation to the post-war world and to the churches.

Then, after years of negotiations, the IMC and WCC were joined in the World Council's Assembly in New Delhi in 1961. Missions now became the largest division of the WCC under the title of the Division of World Mission and Evangelism.

This was a *milestone* in the history of the ecumenical movement! Now the missionary enterprise which was not closely associated with the Eastern Orthodox, or with traditional European and Anglican Churches was made a part of the ecumenical movement. This integration meant that from now onward "the future strategy of world-wide mission and evangelism would be centered in a world-wide council of equally responsible churches," as Dr. Eugene C. Blake put it. It marked the end of East-West and patron-client relation in mission, the beginning of world-wide missionary activities of the churches and missionary societies in connection with Christian Councils of Churches everywhere, and the end of ecclesiastical colonialism. It was hoped that through this incorporation of missions into the World Council of Churches the missionary thrust might bring a new and permeating influence into everything the WCC is and would do. It brought together Anglican and Pentecostal, Orthodox and free churchmen. One Orthodox Archbishop, John of San Francisco, even hoped that the integration of the IMC into the WCC might recapture the ancient missionary vision of the Orthodox Church which centuries ago led to the winning of Russia to Christianity.

New Delhi placed mission at the heart of the church's life and work. Significantly, the Assembly meeting at New Delhi gave considerable time to discussing "the missionary structure of the church," a study which was participated in by churches around the world.

The new Division of World Mission and Evangelism met in Mexico City in 1963, and in Bangkok in 1972. Both Conferences spelled out the implications of the New Delhi integration. But it was at Bangkok that what was started at Edinburgh in 1910 came full cycle.

Over 300 attended the Bangkok Conference; they came from 69 nations; 53 per cent of the delegates came from the Third World. The general theme which had been discussed several years in advance was *Salvation*. The theme, the attendants, and the place of meeting were all related to the significance of the Conference. All the churches associated in the WCC were now giving consideration to "mission" as now understood. Theology and mission, church and mission, unity and mission were the focus of concern. The end of "foreign missions" is God's mission for the total salvation of man personally and corporately. There was no more talk of "for-

eign" missions, but of "the mission" of the church. No more talk of sending and receiving churches; all churches were now sending and receiving churches. Missions are no longer thought of in terms of unreached geographical areas only, but in terms of unreached areas in the life of mankind. All churches are now partners in obedience to God's mission. Salvation is the total liberation of man personally and socially. One prominent delegate put it this way: "We are at the end of one missionary era and at the beginning of the world mission of the church." Jesus Christ is now seen in a larger light; he is set within the center of the world as God's liberating and humanizing power. Bangkok celebrated "the richness of salvation as a gift of God through the Holy Spirit as witnessed in the Scriptures and experienced in many ways by men and women today in their struggles for meaningfulness of life and social justice." Delegates affirmed that they were met around the living person of Jesus Christ; there is none other name given among men by which we must be saved. It is the whole of life that God wants to free from all that enslaves. In accepting the total weakness of the Cross, all power has been given unto him, until the end when he comes to demonstrate his final victory. Jesus Christ is seen at work victoriously every time a man or woman comes to true liberty and accepts his or her responsibility as a person—a child of God. Christians must commit themselves to oppose everything that oppresses men and women, even if that path leads to sacrifice.

Christians are compelled to engage in the spoken word of witness, and to enter into dialogue with all those of our faith, or of another faith, who are also loved by God. In spite of differences, they must never be regarded as enemies, but through Jesus Christ as brother or sister, through whom God wishes to enrich us. A desire to share and let others share should inspire our witness, not the desire to win theological argument. The report states that mission is increasingly being carried on in this spirit without any subsequent decrease in the sense of urgency in evangelism.

To be sure, at Bangkok there was painful dialogue between older and younger churches. The younger churches criticized western churches and their cultural Christianity, their domination of younger churches by their wealth, personnel and rigid theological formulas which are of little concern to churches in non-western cultures. It was a necessary confrontation and a cleansing catharsis. The Third World is no longer an object of missions; its churches are now fellow missionaries, partners in apostolic obedience. Church cooperation is not enough; there must be unity in mission.

The Bangkok Conference left some things to be desired. The Orthodox were concerned about its neglect of church tradition, and its inadequate emphasis upon the transcendent and the sacramental. The evangelicals thought the definition of salvation inadequate because it did not stress salvation from sin adequately. Some regarded its eschatology quite inadequate. Others felt that the concentration upon salvation while good did not seriously consider the growing number, perhaps two billion people, who have never heard of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Yet the Bangkok Conference marked the distance between Edinburgh in 1910 and the church and the world in 1972. A larger and profounder concept of the

finality, uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ has emerged. Bangkok championed a Gospel for every time and place. It affirmed a Gospel and a Christ set down in the heart of the world. The Gospel is not a monopoly of any church; rather the church is its servant in the context of history. And at Bangkok there was no strategy for the conquest of other religions, but rather a plea for the appreciation of other religions and a desire for dialogue with them in the spirit of respect. The finality of Jesus Christ is not abandoned but conceived in deeper, larger, broader dimensions commensurate with the final purpose of God for mankind.

The Great Commission has come full cycle. The authority of Jesus is no longer confined to the human soul and its salvation. His authority is global in extent, profound in personal depth and inclusive in human relationships. It has to do with academia and truth, with the laboratory and the meaning of life, with the market place and everyday economic affairs. It is related to political power, and the uses of natural resources. It has to do with everything that affects the life of man in the mission of God on this planet.

(2)

The second issue which confronted the concept of the finality of Jesus Christ has centered in the religious and cultural developments of modern history.

The predictions that the old non-Christian religions were on the decline have not proven true. Indeed, in some ways they have taken on greater vitality, especially in the wake of growing nationalism and its related cultural religions. Therefore, the Christian mission which was quite absolutist has had to re-examine its claim to the finality of Jesus Christ and the Gospel. And these older religions have not remained provincial; on the contrary, they have invaded the West and are now part of the curriculum of many colleges and universities. And in this time of religious revival there is widespread interest in eastern religions in the West.

Further, there is universal interest in the unity of mankind. Technology has brought about the "global village." This development has also had its effect upon the claim of Christianity for the uniqueness and universality of the Gospel. Sharp criticisms have been made against the divisions in the church that claims a universal Gospel aimed to unite mankind. Such a claim sounds hypocritical and even arrogant in a day when there is a desire for a universal religion that will bring mankind together. Only a humanistic religion that transcends the ideological fragmentation of specific religions can unite mankind, it is claimed. To speak of the finality of Jesus Christ in our time seems to point towards an imperialistic absolutism of the past.

Our times are very much like the first century of the Christian era. Cultural supports had given way, the unity of empire was shattered, and personal resources with which to meet a fluid and broken time were inadequate to cope with the situation. On every hand, there was a desire for a return to old-time religion or a desire to experiment with new religion to give meaning, power and unity to life and society. Little wonder that emperor worship flourished, and that eastern cults and religions were popular. The religions of Mani and Mithras with their ceremonies and rites attracted many who wished to be regenerated within and feel they belonged to an

initiated company of the enlightened. It was said that the gods of Egypt, Persia and Babylonia learned Greek in order to become respectable!

Early Christianity confronted a world of religious interest. Strong appeals were made to have Christianity join these religions, or adopt their language, rites and theologies. In the New Testament such temptations are mentioned in Acts (Simon the magician), the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians. Christianity faced the problem of syncretism, of culture religion, of emperor worship, and of eastern mysticism.

It had to use Greek terms like *pistis* (faith) and *gnosis* (knowledge) to make sense to the Greeks. Could this be done without changing the biblical meaning of these words? Or altering the reality it sought to communicate? Or, could the use of Greek words be regarded as a propaedeutic by which the Greeks could be led to faith in the finality and uniqueness of Jesus Christ? Could Jesus Christ be placed in the imperial pantheon of religions? Could Christian truth be equated with the wisdom of the Greek philosophers? Could Christianity be incorporated into forms of worship taken from the natural and the human world?

Oscar Cullmann maintains, however, that these syncretistic elements, even myths, were indeed appropriated but they were subordinated to the Christological structure which received its character not from Hellenism, nor from mythology. Christians indeed used current religion terms in understanding and communicating their faith, but always on the condition that the church remains subject to the control of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as an historical reality. Christians would not compromise the central and unique Gospel; the deeds of God in Christ were for them the crucial turning points in the meaning and destiny of life. They did not propagate "religion"; they were apostles engaged in telling the *news* of God's *action* for salvation.

This crucial issue has always been with the church. The Gospel is *for* the world, yet *not of* it. In the Renaissance and the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century there were those who revolted against the finality of God's revelation in Jesus Christ and the uniqueness of salvation in and through him. They proposed a natural religion. Rousseau, for instance, maintained that revelation was not only superfluous but that it degraded God by making him known through *one* special people and that of a people rather obscure; that it degraded man's capacity to find truth on his own. What God really wants is sincerity, not submission to revealed truth. This is religion without revelation; it is found in Emerson, Goethe, Huxley, and many others. In short, all great human lights have the same Father; Jesus is *one* of the world's religious pioneers.

The study of comparative religions has given us many insights into the leaders, theologies, liturgies, cultisms, and styles of life of the various religions of mankind. It has shown clearly that there are similarities in the phenomena of all religions. It has tended to indicate that all religions are really one when seen from a phenomenological stance. Indeed, it has challenged the uniqueness and finality of Christianity by pointing out that some of the teachings of Jesus are found in another form in other religions and that the practices of Christians whether in prayer or worship or initiation rites, etc., are like those of other religions.

The psychology and sociology of religion have shown that Christian experience and communal expression are quite similar to those of other religions. And depth psychology, especially in Carl Jung, maintains that man is a religious being. Jung believes that all religious experience means one thing, St. Paul's experience of Christ within is the same psychologically as that which Lao Tse describes in Tao. In short, Christianity is one with the mystery religions.

The resurgent non-Christian religions in our time are fired by a missionary enthusiasm. They are now making a bid for converts in Europe and America, claiming that they can relate persons to the final and the ultimate reality. This resurgence combined with the revolt against Judaeo-Christian prophetism, the desire for a religion that is rooted in nature, and the demand for a universal religion that will unite the world which is one already technologically, challenges the finality and uniqueness of the Gospel.

McLuhan speaks of the world today as united in a "global village." F. S. C. Northrop and Arnold Toynbee are challenging the finality of Jesus Christ because of the emergence of one world. Northrop believes that the unity of mankind is necessary. That unity involves a religion for mankind. But he will have nothing to do with the doctrinal, prophetic or propositional religion of the West. He eschews theistic religion which insists upon reform. He prefers a human religion that is mystical, aesthetic, emotional and intuitive. He rejects the masculinity of a Moses, a Jesus, or a Mohammed.

Toynbee asks Christianity to give up its claim to exclusiveness. He does not believe in a "chosen people," nor in unique truth. The mystery of God is not to be approached in one way only. If God is love he would not "empty" himself in *one* place and time and person. Toynbee finds the self-sacrificing spirit in the ancient worship of Buddhism, and not exclusively in Christianity. Like Northrop, Toynbee wants a religion that is deeply rooted in nature and in man. And both are concerned about a mysticism that unites rather than a religion that divides on the content of propositional truth. Both reject Christianity because they regard it as a religion of ideas. (Lesslie Newbiggin replies by stating that Christianity is not primarily "views" but "news"! News of an event centering in a Person.)

Modern man believes that there are many ways to God and that they all lead to the same goal; therefore, all religions are good for those who belong to them. And all contain some truth; put the best of them together and the result would be a common denominator religion valid for all people and all time.

However, many questions need to be raised about these positions. Is there such a thing as Religion in the singular? The more we know about any religion the more we realize that it holds truths that cannot be fused with those of other religions. Is it possible to build a world Religion out of best excerpts of all religions, when the essential ingredients of the great religions are incompatible? The major issue is *not* in the *practices* of religions but in their *basic truths*. Non-Christian religions are usually related to particular cultures and they are difficult to incorporate or domesticate into other cultures.

However, Christianity has a character all its own, even though it is similar to other religions in many ways. It has a book, a cultus, a personal center, a set of

doctrines, a group of set-apart leaders, a variety of institutions, a number of ceremonies, and the like. But, it has always maintained that its basis is not in a man-made mysticism or ideology, but in a Person: Jesus Christ. The Old and the New Testaments do not deal with eternal "values" but with meaningful actions centering in historical personages and events.

The coming of this Person has changed the human situation. This Person is human, but he is also unique. He has a mission none other has ever claimed. He combines in himself the Son of Man and the Suffering Servant. He is the Second Adam, the source and center of a new humanity. In his words, his life-style, actions, suffering, death and resurrection, he was man for all mankind. He brought grace and truth and right into the human situation, into man, and through his continuing and living Lordship he pulls those who "receive" him towards the future. Those who are "in him" have a new life together; they are the community of the realized universalism who live and work in the meaning and destiny of history. The community's main task is to *be* that community and to witness to God-in-Christ's presence, action and hope.

Indeed, the Church has failed in fulfilling its high vocation. It has lost some of its brightest and best minds because it was either unprepared or unwilling to be clear about and obedient to this universalism in Jesus Christ. The Church has remained shamefully divided, or developed false unities. It has often been a competitive "religion" among other religions. It has betrayed the Gospel and blunted its power of witness. It has all too often made itself an end instead of the servant of God's mission.

"But," it may be asked, "Does not the claim to finality and uniqueness make Christianity provincial, arrogant, militant, triumphant and intolerable?" There is nothing *provincial* about Jesus Christ. He has made his way across the world and into most of the cultures of mankind. Often he breaks out of man's institutional and provincial prisons into which his followers have confined him. He is not bound by race, time, culture, sex, nation. He is more than an individual; he possesses corporate character. Indeed, because he is the Logos made flesh he is latent in all persons. He is radically individual and radically universal. He is radically human and uniquely divine. As Harvey Cox once put it: "The Church is in the broadcasting business, proclaiming that in and through Jesus Christ God has let loose a liberating movement in history for all mankind." The more serious the Church and the Christian become about Jesus Christ the more universal they become.

And how can the church of the Christian become *arrogant* or *superior*, when the Gospel is a *gift* of God's grace and not an achievement of man? Always the believer in Jesus Christ realizes that he is the recipient of the Gospel; therefore his true spirit is one of gratitude and humility. The Church does not possess the Gospel; it is only its obedient servant and witness. The compulsion of gratitude is the dynamic for witness, not the desire to *make* others believe through intimidation or coercion. "We preach Christ not ourselves, ourselves your servant for Jesus' sake," St. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians. The Christian lives by what is *given*. As such his life-style is one of worship and service. God is the source of freedom and love; as such he is engaged in a task involving high risk. Any encounter or dialogue with

others, whether atheist or non-Christian religionist must be carried on in the spirit of freedom and love and integrity. It must partake of the same spirit of high risk.

The finality and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ cannot be promoted any longer by military force, colonial domination, cultural superiority, or even by dogmatic debate. It must be done in the same weakness of him who bore the Cross and made himself utterly vulnerable to sinful men. He came "not to be ministered unto but to minister and give his life a ransom for many." In any relationship with persons anywhere on this planet, Jesus Christ is to be shared in the spirit through which God shared his Son. Only in this way can faith-response take place in the freedom of the Spirit. Finality and uniqueness of Jesus Christ must stand in their own sovereign reality. The answer to the question, "What think you of Christ?" must be made in the atmosphere that is free of manipulation, deception, or sentiment.

Today, the relation of Christianity to other religions is open to many options: conquest; eclectic federation; fusion; neutral *détente*; mutual respect; open dialogue; clear witness by life and word in a world of many religious appeals. All of these options are now under discussion. Some are quite impossible for obvious reasons. We believe that mutual respect, dialogue, and free witness are of the very spirit of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Perhaps the Gospel now will have its opportunity to make its way among persons by the sheer integrity and genuine reality of its center: the Person of Jesus Christ in his presence, power and purpose.

Once exception must certainly be made, and that is in the relation of Judaism to Christianity. Will Herberg has provided a clarifying statement in this regard: Judaism and Christianity are one faith expressed in two religions: Judaism facing inward to the Jews, and Christianity facing outward to the Gentiles. The Jew sees Jesus as emerging from Israel and going forth; he sees Christ from the rear; the Christian sees Jesus as coming towards him, because he is a Christian. The relation of Christianity and Judaism takes place "within the family," so to speak.

(3)

The concept of the finality of Jesus Christ has also been radically affected by the developments in Christological study. While the Christian community wrestled, especially in the first six centuries with ways of understanding and interpreting the person of Jesus Christ, it was not until after the Reformation in the sixteenth century that Christology has been radically fragmented.

The early church engaged in heated and even violent conflict about the person of Jesus Christ. Diversities of viewpoints are already found in the New Testament. Shortly after the first generation of Christians, traditions began to arise in several centers of the church, usually associated with a great Christian leader or a "school" of Christian thought. To be sure, these rival traditions were associated with the political situation which brought the controversy into public attention and politicized Christian doctrine.

Very early the crucial issue began to center in whether Jesus Christ was human, or divine, or both. The docetistic party could not accept a Son of God who was fully human; the ebionite party could not accept a human Jesus Christ who was fully divine. There were those who thought of Jesus Christ as both human and

divine, fully human and fully divine, mysteriously united yet separated. The Chalcedonian Council finally settled on an overall umbrella-like statement which did not define the human and the divine relation in Jesus Christ, but which rejected the heresies which would make him *only* human or *only* divine. The Chalcedonian "consensus" was an expression of the use of ecumenical language in which ambiguities could live together in an uneasy peace!

Whatever we may think about Chalcedon, it must be admitted that all parties agreed on the centrality of Jesus Christ in the Christian faith. God and man were uniquely and finally united in him to bring about redemption from sin, freedom from evil principalities and powers, and true life in time and eternity. About this salvation there was no difference, although interpretations of its nature varied. The conflict was about crucial realities in the life of God and man and history. Their "consensus" may not sound rational at all; indeed, it is in some ways an affront to human intelligence, but their "instinct" for the essential and final character of Jesus Christ is irrefutable. Their controversy was within the framework of a common faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Lord and Savior of the world. Chalcedon was more of a definition of the problem than its solution. It affirmed the faith of Christians at the time—and ever since—that "Jesus Christ was at once truly a man and also uniquely God in human flesh."

At the time of the Reformation the critical mind of Christians was brought to bear upon the intellectual meaning of Chalcedon and Constantinople, at a period when the authoritarian powers of church and state were no longer able to control heretical tendencies. To be sure, these tendencies were previously at work; there were pre-Reformation groups in the church which placed a larger emphasis upon the humanity of Jesus than upon dogmatic images and formulas about him. The Reformation, it may be said, stressed the "benefits" of Jesus Christ in terms of the fruits he effects in human life. This has opened up a Pandora's box of Christologies, in the midst of which we in the latter part of the twentieth century are now living. Of one thing, however, we must be clear: the church has always held firmly to the great polarity in its Christology, namely that we meet in Jesus Christ one who is unique, final (ultimate) and universal, and that we meet true man and true God in him as nowhere else, however this relation may now be described.

Since the Reformation much has happened in the world and in the church. In fact, the world of Christendom has been fragmented into national and denominational groups. The great empires are gradually dissolving as new nations, each with a different ethos, have come into being. And in those new nations where Christianity has been introduced from the West, there is a drive for a Christian identity that is indigenous. New types of Christianity have developed which try to be true to historic faith but are expressed in a new cultural context. The result has been the creation of images of Jesus Christ which deviate from those of older parent churches. Each in a sense is painting a portrait of Jesus Christ with "his own brush." In short, the ecumenical and international reality has had a profound effect upon Christology in the churches.

Denominational proliferation in an atmosphere of freedom has shattered the authority of the church to maintain uniformity in Christology. To be sure, there

are orthodox groups in Christianity which tenaciously hold to the historical formulas of Chalcedon and Constantinople. There are neo-orthodox who hold to the traditional values or meanings of the historic faith, but interpret these values or meanings in terms of modern realities. There are liberal Christian groups who maintain the finality and uniqueness of Jesus Christ, but not in terms of classical essences and substances; they may speak of Jesus as the Son of God and the Son of Man but they interpret his divinity in terms of the unique degree of God-consciousness that was in him. There are humanists who have a high regard for the character of Jesus but who reject any reference to his transcendence affirmed by the church's ancient creeds. Indeed, there are many outside the churches who today have a high regard for Jesus and value him as the one in whom there is genuine integrity and true humanity.

There has been among sincere churchmen a dissatisfaction with the language of Chalcedon and Constantinople. Modern man no longer thinks in terms of "substances and essences." He is a pragmatist who has little patience with theological language. He regards a theology concerned with transcendence as irrelevant and meaningless. Such speculative thinking is out of order at a time when all good men should *do* something to bring about a better quality of human life. This is a dynamic age. Interest in personal happiness and well-being seems to be the chief end of every man.

Chalcedon is a landmark in Christian thought. It is still useful for theologians who are specialists in this area. But, Chalcedon has no missionary thrust. It lacks the dynamic found in the early Christian's faith in Jesus Christ as a living presence and power in life and in the world. As a classical statement it offers bold guidelines about the finality, decisiveness, uniqueness and centrality of Jesus Christ. It must be respected. It still points to the two great poles of Christian faith in and about him, his community and its mission for all mankind.

There is abroad in the church a justifiable desire for a restatement on the person of Jesus Christ. And today it seems that almost every conceivable image of Jesus Christ is to be found inside and outside the churches. On the one hand, there is the majestic Christ of liturgy, symbol, hymn, sacrament and creed; on the other hand there is human Jesus of the "Jesus people." And there is the Alpha and Omega Christ of Teilhard de Chardin and the Jesus Christ Superstar of stage, film and rock.

Since the Reformation the tendency has been to explore the humanity of Jesus Christ. Or, through historical criticism, to emphasize his personal religion rather than faith in him as the Christ of God. The natural sciences with their interpretation of process in nature, life and history have tended to place Jesus in the sweep of evolution, and to set him and the Christian movement in the context of the history of all religions. The man-sciences which have rejected older theories of personality and social reality make it a point to interpret personal and social reality in terms of dynamic processes. As a result, the figure of Jesus Christ seems to lose its traditional transcendent interpretation. And if God is taken seriously at all, he is dynamically related to the processes of nature and history. The tendency has been to naturalize, historicize and humanize Jesus Christ.

To be sure, a reaction against the trend towards the historical Jesus took place when Albert Schweitzer raised the question as to how little we know about the historical figure, and he affirmed that Jesus emphasized the eschatological character of the Kingdom as an inbreak or invasion into history. This eschatological emphasis was crucial in the development of neo-orthodoxy and human interpretations of Jesus has had a profound effect upon Christological thought in recent decades, so much so that both emphases on the otherness and the humanness of Jesus Christ are taken more seriously in a new and dialectical way.

Limitations of time and space make it impossible to deal with all the major Christologies that have emerged since the Reformation. The great lights of the Renaissance and Enlightenment paid the highest tribute to Jesus as a man and indeed as a religious person through whose words and life the universal truth and love were made manifest. Hegel regarded Christ as the supreme appearance of the unity between man and God. Schleiermacher in the last century rejected the metaphysical and ontological aspects of Chalcedon and affirmed that Jesus Christ had the "value" of God. He revealed the God of and in all men through his unique God-consciousness and thereby is the Savior of mankind. Ritschl was not concerned about *who* Jesus was; rather he went beyond Schleiermacher in stressing the moral and ethical teachings of Jesus rather than his person. Tillich interpreted Jesus as the New Being who alone experienced the authentic life for all persons, by overcoming all the effects of man's tragic estrangement between his essence and his existence, as well as all the brokenness and fragmentation of man's life. Tillich appealed to a generation that knew the meaning of alienation and brokenness. He made the traditional Christian faith and terms come alive with a contemporary relevance.

Harnack rejected the Christ of faith and regarded the very essence of Christianity the religion of Jesus. And Bonhoeffer, so widely read and quoted in our time, but often misinterpreted, gave us Jesus, "the man for others." He recognized the need to make Jesus Christ known to people who had lost the "God hypothesis." For him the real thing about Jesus Christ is his freedom from "religion" and the trappings of the established church. Bonhoeffer places Jesus Christ radically at the center. But his is no humanitarian or liberal Christ. The humanity of God for him is seen in the light of Barth's humanity of God; that is of God who becomes a true human with the awesome reality of transcendent ultimacy. Bonhoeffer believed in the transcendent Word of God as embodied in Jesus Christ. To know this man Jesus Christ, is to know the Logos, maintained Bonhoeffer. He does not base his faith upon his own experience of Jesus Christ; rather, he insists that only when he knows *who* Jesus Christ *is* does he have access to his words. The objectivity of Jesus Christ is prior to man's experience of redemption. The reality of the divine and human unity in Jesus Christ is essential. Encounter with Jesus Christ is essential for life and death.

One of Barth's last writings was entitled *The Humanity of God*. This was a surprise to those who regarded Barth's emphasis upon the otherness of God as inimical to any real incarnation. Yet Barth's many-volumed *Church Dogmatics* makes Jesus Christ the incarnate Word central to his theology. His thinking came full cycle,

but only after he had made sure that the humanity of God issued from the *freedom* and the love of *God*. Only God's sovereign freedom and self-giving grace makes the humanity of Jesus Christ the miraculous act it is.

Bishop Robinson's *The Human Face of God*, suggests that we move away from traditional ways of understanding Jesus Christ. He criticizes the popular image of Jesus as (1) an insertion into humanity from without; as (2) an immaculate paragon lacking real humanity, and (3) as a God incarnate but in disguise. Rather, Robinson finds in Jesus the humanity everyone is called to be. He is a man, but one doing human things divinely. Only one who is human can save humans. His finality is in the action of God in and through him. And the Bishop insists that he is not a heretic, but stands within the Christian tradition, and that he is interpreting not transforming, the meaning of Chalcedon in meaningful contemporary language.

There are other serious scholars who are working out newer aspects of the person of Jesus Christ as they seek to combine the profound current needs of man with the objective offer of God's loving action in the human and natural context which will effect the purpose of God in bringing mankind to its true humanity. Wolfhart Pannenberg strongly affirms the historical Jesus, the fact of his resurrection, and works at a Christology which is not from above but from "below." Liberation theologians affirm that Jesus Christ is God's action aimed to bring about a "new way to be a man, a permanent cultural revolution," by freeing man from the bondage of sin and all that dehumanizes him. Jesus is more than personal savior; he is corporate founder of God's true community centered in the Cross. Barth affirmed that the Gospel proclaims God's togetherness with man; he identifies himself with man in his suffering, despair and unfreedom. And there are other scholars who are relating Christ to high doctrine. They relate the humanity of Jesus and the cosmic dimensions that are in him.

All this Christological ferment may account for the "popularity" of Jesus in our time. The paperback New Testament, *Good News for Modern Man*, has surpassed Spock's book on child nurture in distribution. It is estimated that over 44 million copies are in circulation. Jesus "made" the front page of *Time* as a stage and film celebrity. Andrew Greeley in (an) article in the *Sunday New York Times Magazine* (December 23, 1973), *A Christmas Biography*, asks if Jesus is "hippie hero," "superpatriot," or "Superstar"? Some do regard this portrayal of Jesus as good news because he has been released from the grave clothes of deadly tradition and made a popular figure. Others regard this portrayal as bad news, because it reduces the historical Jesus Christ to the level of vulgarity. He is made into an "entertainment culture hero," a "gun-toting revolutionary," an "American superpatriot," something which he would reject were he to return. Andrew Greeley wonders what Jesus would do about the action of the Danish government in financing a pornographic film about his love life!

This is a time when new images and concepts of Jesus Christ are "bursting out all over the place." They range from the classical orthodox figure to the far out hippie hero; from Teilhard de Chardin's majestic Christ who is the Alpha and Omega

point in the whole cosmic process to Jesus as portrayed as a clown; from the myth of Allegro to the political activist; from the near-magician worker of miracles to the human liberator.

Many indeed are at work today trying to give meaning to the affirmations of historical Christology in language and concepts that modern man can understand and accept as credible and relevant to today's emphasis upon dynamic reality in creation, personality, and society.

Where is the finality or uniqueness of Jesus Christ to be found in this welter of Christ images which have been let loose inside and outside the churches? In how far do these innovations affect the traditional polarity of Chalcedon about Jesus Christ being truly God and truly man in the unity of his person?

It is evident that this is no time to attempt a definitive creedal formulation on the finality of Jesus Christ. It is a time of creative ferment when exploration into the person of Jesus Christ is pursued by expert theologians and naive Jesus freaks. It is a time of experimentation with the reality of Jesus Christ as it expresses itself in innovative and manifold forms. It is a time to test the spirits that claim their inspiration in Jesus Christ, and to test them for authenticity through the three tried authorities of Christian history: (1) the Bible (Word); (2) the church or corporate historic Christian experience; and (3) the immediate personal experience of contemporary disciples. This time of creative ferment is not to be lamented and squelched, but to be welcomed and evaluated with a sincere openmindedness and the theological intelligence to see if what is happening is of God or not.

Of one thing we are sure: this Jesus Christ is still a reality with which to reckon. All of the social and religious shocks of our time have not made him obsolete or irrelevant. On the contrary, he seems to be more contemporary and relevant than ever. The historic claim that the life and death, resurrection and living presence of Jesus Christ is a divine-human event and continuing action by which all men and women of all generations and cultures may become truly human, enjoy eternal communion with the living God and take on a new sense of vocation. The wonder is not that so many have rejected this event and action; rather, the wonder is that so large a number of persons in history have accepted it, live by it, and find life's highest meaning in it.

Perhaps we in *our time* are coming into a new understanding of what Chalcedon affirmed in *its time*. Much depends upon the way in which we define "finality." Perhaps the term should be abandoned, since it suggests that something was done at a certain time in history which is eternally fixed and formed, and that all that is necessary is assent to what was done. Indeed, something was done in and through Jesus Christ by and for God and man that was epochal, unrepeatable and unique. It was an act to be perennially and creatively remembered. Nothing like it has been done before or since. And it seems unlikely to be done in the future, since there is something about the event, action, and person that seems impossible to repeat or to supersede.

But what happened was dynamic and personal and not only conceptual or doctrinal. What took place in, around and through Jesus Christ in relation to God and

man is not primarily in the realm of substance or essence but in terms of spirit, love, purpose, goodness, mercy, truthfulness. In him God was in redeeming and saving action making known and available his purpose, his love, his character, his rightness, his presence. God did not need to reveal scientific knowledge or mathematical formulas to bring man into true humanity. They are not "saving knowledge." Finality means that in Jesus Christ God was himself as fully present as it is possible for him to be present in a truly human life and situation for the purpose of restoring man to his true estate.

In this sense of finality, the historical appearance of Jesus Christ becomes an assurance that God is with us and for us. He is Immanuel: God with us. He is the presence of God in our lostness; he is the hope of God in our despair; he is the victory in our world of tragedy, evil powers and death; he is the liberator in our world of bondage and slavery; he is the forgiveness and acceptance of God in our alienation and guilt; he is our wisdom and courage for the facing of these days.

He is the fulfillment not only of Hebrew prophecy, but of all those deep hungers in man for a fulfiller, a Lord and a Savior. He has about him a genuine humanness that appeals to people of all cultures and races. He is God-centered man for all men and he is man-centered man for God. He is full of God and full of man. Life for him was a gift, a stewardship and a service. He had a sense of coming from God, engaging in God's business, and giving himself even to death to fulfill his mission for God and man. In meeting him, we meet both God and ourselves in depth. And the greatest question that man still confronts is, "What think you of Christ?"

Is the finality and *uniqueness* in Jesus Christ one of *degree* or kind? If God is thought of as impassible, totally other, then no Incarnation is possible, except in a tangential way. Indeed, as Barth puts it, God in his *freedom* chose not to live in isolation. He has in his love bound himself to man in an indissoluble and infinite love, which involves him in suffering as revealed in the Cross. There is in Jesus Christ such a high degree of manhood and Godhood that for those with sensitive spirits is for all practical purposes a difference in kind. Only in that high experience can the disciple say, "My Lord, and my God," "truly man and truly God." The greatest Christian spirits have made this their noblest confession.

Conclusion

In the discussion of the finality, uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ we are dealing with a Person, with the persons who have responded to him, and with the community that he through the Spirit created and creates. We are not dealing with philosophical principles, or scientific formulae, or with mathematical propositions. To be sure, we must use rational processes and scientific methods in thinking about Jesus Christ and the Christianity he has created, since they are historical data and are subject to careful investigation and rational judgment.

Perhaps, as already suggested, the word "finality" should not be used, since it suggests that there is a dated historical finality about Jesus Christ; everything associated with him has been completed in the past. And what he brought into the world consisted of propositions and institutions which are valid for all time. The

case for Christianity can therefore be proven once and for all. The blueprint has been revealed; it includes a final dogmatic theology, an infallible church, a closed book, a definite style of life.

However, this is not the kind of finality which is compatible with the personal and dynamic nature of God or revelation which we know in Jesus Christ. Finality should perhaps be thought of in terms of a "moving absolute," a "dynamic continuity," a personal and communal reality, or a decisive quality. Those who confront him sense a meeting with the ultimate divine and human reality.

And while the teachings of Jesus may be found in some form in non-Christian religions, and while there are features and characteristics about him that are also found in the leaders of non-Christian religions, there is something about him as Person and Event that is quite different from the leaders and teachings of other religions. Jesus' God-consciousness, his death on the Cross, and his resurrection that gives a unique integrity and authority to his Person and teachings. People followed him because his resurrection authenticated his life-style and saviorhood. Those who compare Jesus' teachings and his sacrificial style of life with other religious teachings and leaders, fail to recognize that the God who is at the heart of that life-style and those teachings has a character and a quality that is unique. There is something about this Jesus that is in a category all its own. This does not deny that there are revelations in other religions. But attempts to level out Jesus Christ by placing him on an equality with others in the pantheon of human religion simply do not make sense. The major questions still are, "What think you of this Jesus? Whose son is he?"

Now, there have been many arguments in Christian history to prove the finality and uniqueness of Jesus Christ. He fulfilled prophecy; he was born in the "fullness of time" in a world culture; he appeared at a strategic geographic place where great cultures met; he was born of a virgin; his birth was accompanied by the appearance of a star; he was visited by wise men in search of a "King"; he performed signs and miracles; he spoke from an intrinsic authority; he made great claims for himself; he had authority over sickness and death, wind and waves; he gave himself unto death in the firm belief that he was doing something decisive for God and man; he was raised from the dead and all that he said, did and was were thereby vindicated; he is generator, sustainer and dynamic of a world-wide community that continues to grow; he is the creator of much in human culture which is good and true and right; he is today more widely known and respected than ever before in history; his life-style, teachings and revelation of the character and purpose of God are becoming inevitable in the human crisis now increasingly evident on this planet.

Indeed, this is a formidable list of "proofs" of the reality and power of Jesus Christ with which to confront any critical inquirer. Many of these evidences are still relevant in an apologetic for the unusual Person at the heart of the Christian faith. However, there are limits in this kind of an apologetic. The disciple of Jesus Christ is rarely led to faith in and commitment to him only by rational argument or historical evidence, however important they may be. Without the personal response of the individual to the Word through the experience of the historical com-

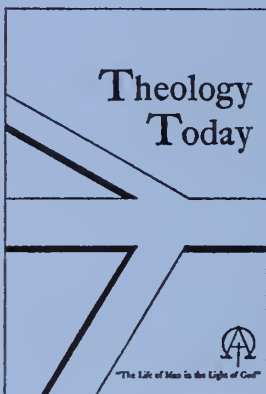
munity, the finality of Jesus Christ remains a literary record or an historical event. The finality of Jesus Christ eventually must involve a personal response on the part of one who has met him in the testimony of the biblical witness and historic Christian believers.

When John the Baptist was imprisoned, he sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask him for a plain answer to the question, "Are you the one to come or should we look for another?" Jesus did not answer with a simple Yes or No. He told John through his two friends what was happening in, through and around him, and left John to come to his own conclusion. On the basis of what they "saw and heard" about Jesus, John was urged to make a decision and a commitment. What they saw and heard was not spectacular miracle or philosophical truth. No neat ready-made answer was given because the judgment of persons about Jesus Christ is a deeply personal matter; it involves the freedom of faith or unbelief, and it is open to greater revelation and larger dimensions of understanding. And the Ultimate is never a human possession. Finality is not a finished category; rather it is a dynamic and personal process. Barth said it is not a "certitude" but an "assurance." Jesus added a significant postscript to his response to John's question, "Happy is the man who is not offended in me." Happy is the man who believes in Jesus in a personal trust, and who accepts the kind of evidence he supplies. Jesus thereby disassociated himself from any dogmatic attempt to place him or his relationship with his followers in a closed proposition. Revelation as well as discipleship are growing realities.

Perhaps in our time with its emphasis upon the personal, the human and the immanent, the finality, uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ will be a conviction that comes more easily from "below" than from "above," more easily through a relationship with the "humanity of God" than through the highly formulated Christologies of the past. Later, we may come into a fuller Christology and a clear apprehension of the transcendent glory of God in the humble humanity of Jesus.

However, it must be said that a Jesus without a Christology or a Christology without Jesus is not satisfactory. Still stands the great polarity which Chalcedon tried to proclaim but never defined: this Jesus is truly man and truly God in one being, however we may express that unique relationship in our time. Robert E. Speer expressed it impressively and convincingly in his time.

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